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The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) ***supports with revisions*** HB-6966 - AN ACT **CONCERNING MUNICIPAL NEWSPAPER POSTINGS**, which is aimed at reducing costs associated with the mandate that towns post legal notices in the newspaper.

For small towns, state aid to municipalities has been largely flat funded, putting considerable pressure on property taxpayers to fund more of the cost of delivering critical services, such as education, transportation and public safety. And this year, small towns are facing cuts in aid for critical programs – the Resident State Trooper program, regional fire training schools, the Nutmeg Network, Youth Services Bureaus and other programs.

Towns are looking for ways to hold down property taxes but unfunded state mandates continue to drive up local costs beyond the control of our small towns and cities. Connecticut must help to relieve some of the burden on our small towns and cities by providing relief from unfunded mandates and refraining from adopting any new unfunded mandates, however well-intentioned.

Towns are required by law to publish numerous legal notices in newspapers. Unfortunately, advertising prices have increased dramatically, placing a fiscal burden on Connecticut's small towns. In addition, many small town newspapers have gone out of business, requiring towns to publish notices in the more expensive metropolitan newspapers. ***Input from our small towns indicates that towns spend from \$5,000 - \$35,000 each year to publish legal notices in newspapers.***

Increasingly, taxpayers go to their municipal websites to find up-to-date information on issues affecting towns, including legal notices. ***Recognizing that consumers are more likely to receive information online than in newspapers, lawmakers recently approved legislation allowing state agencies to post certain legal notices online.*** For example, Public Act 13-205 allows the state Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP), under certain circumstances, to publicly notice permit application information on its website rather than in a newspaper.

However, to ensure that the bill provides towns with meaningful mandate relief while providing accurate, timely access to information regarding notices that are required to be disseminated to the public, COST urges revisions to HB-6966. As currently drafted, the bill will require the town to include in its published notice a statement referring the reader to newspaper's website for additional information. This is an unnecessary step that may wind up eroding any real savings associated with the bill. It will also complicate the process for accessing municipal legal notices.



For the vast majority of people, posting legal notices on municipal websites will allow greater access to this information. Municipal websites are devoted exclusively to providing residents, businesses and the public with information about municipal operations and services. Newspaper websites, however, are developed to meet a variety of needs – breaking news, sports, weather, advertising, videos, streaming news, etc. Some newspaper websites are very difficult to navigate and users are frustrated by pop up ads, questionnaires, and other distracting features. Public Notices will be crowded out.

We therefore urge lawmakers to revise HB-6966 to reflect that municipalities may publish a summary of the notice in the newspaper directing the reader to the municipal website for more information. ***Allowing towns to post such notices on their websites will help reduce the fiscal burden on our local governments while ensuring that the public has access to such notices.***

COST urges support for HB-6966, with revisions, and appreciates the committee's efforts to address this issue.

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